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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000756

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND G/TIP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KTIP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: SLOW AND STEADY PROGRESS COMBATING TIP IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

REF: A) HCMC 936 B) HCMC 806 AND PREVIOUS

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**¶1.** (U) Summary: The GVN made positive strides in combating trafficking-in-persons (TIP) during the first half of 2008, with provincial police busting four trafficking rings in Tay Ninh and HCMC police conducted their biggest raid yet against an illegal marriage brokering agency catering to Korean men. Additionally, complementary efforts between the Vietnam's Women Union and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to assist Vietnamese women considering marriage to foreign husbands are providing alternatives to illegal marriage broker operations that can be fronts for trafficking and prostitution. Government officials and NGOs all agreed more resources are needed to raise awareness and improve Vietnam's law enforcement efforts in combating TIP and illegal marriage broker schemes. End Summary.

Arrests Are Increasingly Frequent -- and Public

**¶2.** (SBU) In Tay Ninh province, located on the border with Cambodia, police broke up 4 trafficking rings, arresting a total of 11 suspects and rescued 15 TIP victims in a series of raids carried out during the first half of 2008. Two of the trafficking groups posed as marriage brokers recruiting Vietnamese women for marriage to Malaysian men. On July 17 in Ho Chi Minh City, a 3am police raid disrupted a meeting where 112 women were gathered in a 15x2 meter room in a mini-hotel for the perusal of three Korean clients.

**¶3.** (SBU) These recent law enforcement efforts illustrate the strides Southern officials are making to implement the GVN's anti-trafficking policies by cracking down on illegal marriage schemes. Recently, HCMC People's Committee Vice Chair Nguyen Thanh Tai called upon city officials to impose strict penalties on illegal marriage brokers. Efforts to foster greater inter-agency collaboration against trafficking and recognition that men need to be included in Vietnam's legal framework indicates that Vietnam is "getting it" and steadily moving on the right path to build capacity towards eventual ratification of the International Convention Against Trafficking.

Raising Awareness, Empowering Women

**¶4.** (SBU) Complementing law enforcement efforts to combat TIP and crack down on illegal marriage brokers, the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) combine public awareness campaigns, counseling/assistance programs, and pre-departure orientation programs to promote a safe, transparent and free way to assist women who choose to pursue foreign marriages. Spurred on by the glamorous lifestyles depicted in increasingly popular Korean soap operas, music videos and movies, Korea is now a destination of choice for many young Vietnamese women seeking marriage abroad. Thanh Nien newspaper reported 10,000 Vietnamese brides migrated to

Korea last year, up 74 percent from the previous year.

¶ 15. (SBU) PolOffs recently visited the HCMC Marriage Assistance Center to discuss the Center's efforts to provide an alternative way for Vietnamese women interested in foreign marriages to meet potential spouses in a safe and supportive environment (ref A). The Center, which receives funding from the Korean government, provides a matchmaking service that not only introduces Vietnamese women to their future spouses, but also provides counseling and classes in Korean culture, language and legal regulations. The Center asks prospective brides and grooms to fill out profiles and then arranges for the couples to exchange emails and chat via Webcam, if both mutually agree. Interpretation assistance is also available if needed. While the Center is small and resources are scarce (there is only one computer station thus far), the services are free and much more comprehensive than those provided by commercial matchmakers.

¶ 16. (SBU) IOM's pre-departure workshops for young women and user-friendly website ([www.vovietchonghan.org](http://www.vovietchonghan.org)) are intended to set appropriate expectations and dispel the popular illusions promulgated by commercial marriage brokers and the glamorous lifestyles depicted in popular Korean entertainment media. The IOM website depicts a "wheel of life" that illustrates two different scenarios--one side of the wheel shows a happy Vietnamese bride with a handsome young Korean husband at a fancy modern wedding, another shows an older Korean man with hoe in hand standing in front of a rural farmhouse. The Vietnamese, Korean and English-language website has hotline numbers, recent news articles and testimonials from Vietnamese brides living in Korea. IOM has also compiled a wealth of information about Korean law, housing, transportation, foods and customs in a handbook given to every young woman who participates in their pre-departure workshops.

¶ 17. (SBU) Women entering into marriages based on uninformed and overly glamorous images of life abroad represents only part of

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problem posed by commercial marriage brokers. As in the case of the trafficker of "brides" to Malaysia who was recently busted, commercial matchmakers are frequently fronts for criminal groups that entrap women via promises of marriage to rich men only to sell them into forced prostitution. Programs organized by the Vietnam Women's Union and IOM target these scams as well through a combination of public awareness campaigns and individual counseling. By offering a safe, legal alternative to commercial brokers, support centers run by the VWU and programs operated by IOM serve to help women avoid becoming unwitting victims of traffickers. Unfortunately, these programs are only reaching a fraction of the estimated 12,000 Vietnamese women who immigrate for purposes of marriage each year.

¶ 17. Comment: While anti-TIP efforts are improving, they are far from perfect. Continued improvements in the collection of statistics, more resources and improved coordination between Vietnamese officials and regional governments are needed in order to combat trafficking-in-persons more comprehensively and effectively. As in other poor developing countries, poverty will remain a strong force in pushing women into situations where there are at risk of being trafficked. The accurate and well intentioned messages broadcast by local and international NGOs simply are not as convincing to many poor rural women as are the glamorous imagery promulgated in popular Korean TV shows, movies and music videos. Fortunately, Vietnam's news media is playing an increasingly constructive role by reporting extensively on marriage broker schemes, TIP arrests and convictions, and by articles retelling the tragic stories of failed cross-cultural marriages. End comment.

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